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Paying the price

On the insertion of a one-rupee coin, an automatic weighing machine at the airport ejects a neatly printed card showing one's weight.

Fascinated by this machine, a little boy stood on its footplate, reached up and dropped a one-rupee coin into the appropriate slot. The machine made a rattling noise, then the card, with the child's weight printed on it, came out of another slot.

The little boy found this amusing. He demanded more coins from his parents and kept repeating the process, just as if it were a game. And the machine never failed to oblige him. Every time he put in a coin, a card would come out. But, finally he ran out of one rupee coins. He only had a 50 paise coin left. So he just put that in the slot. The machine made the same rattling noise as before, but no printed card appeared. With no response from the machine, the little boy started to cry.

But this was the occasion not to cry but to learn a lesson. The machine's failure to oblige was a silent reproach to both the child and his parents. Its significance was that everything had its price, and that without paying in full, no one could satisfy wants.

This is a law, which applies equally to our present world and to the Hereafter. It is only on payment of the full price that we can receive anything in either of the two worlds. One who is not prepared to pay should have no expectations of receiving anything. This law is immutable and eternal, and no amount of wishful thinking or voicing of protests will ever put an end to it.

The Antidote

In a statement made to the Rajya Sabha in July 1991, Mr. M.M Jacob, Minister of State for Home Affairs, put the number of suicides in Delhi alone during the three and a half year period from January 1988, to June 30, 1991, at 2,700. He said that the basic reason for taking this step was extreme frustration. (*Hindustan Times*, August 1, 1991)

It is only very rarely that a handicapped person kills himself. Most of the people who die by their own hands are physically quite healthy. There are many reasons, however, for their taking the extreme step of suicide: failure to gain admission to post-graduate courses, or to secure a good job after completing a university education, postponement of promotion, inability to marry the person of one's choice.

Most of these people had everything in their favour, including good health. They lacked none of the necessities of life. But because one thing, which seemed of great importance to them, eluded their grasp, they fell a prey to such an overwhelming sense of frustration that they decided to end it all.

One thing – the greatest thing in the world – was absent from all of their lives: hope. Man lives on hope. Where it evades him, life appears so meaningless that he sees no sense in continuing with it. That is when he takes his own life.

The mistake all suiciders make is to look only at the present and not at the future. Because the present has not been blessed with abundance that does not mean that the future will not change for the better. If a man contemplating suicide were instead to turn his attention to exploiting his own capabilities and seizing whatever opportunities came his way, it is very likely that he would come to possess all those things, absence of which makes him so miserable today.

The man whose gaze is fixed on the present may find much to depress him. It is only when he looks to the future that he will find the courage to act.

(216:12)

Silence

Ernest Psiachari (1883-1914), a French writer, was in his youth a free-thinker and an atheist. But later he reverted to Christianity. Grandson of the famous historian, Ernest Rinan, Psiachari is ranked among those who made an effort to bring about a spiritual awakening in France at the turn of the twentieth century. One of his sayings has been rendered in English in these words:

Silence is a bit of heaven that comes down to earth.

Silence is the language of nature. When one observes silence one finds oneself at one with nature, and surely there is no higher plane on which the human soul may exist.

Man cannot, of course, remain silent in the absolute sense. When he appears to be silent, he is so for others, not for himself. Remaining silent as far the external world goes, he starts conversing with his internal world.

Observing silence is a great act. When one is silent one's attention is diverted more to 'heavenly' matters than to 'down-to-earth' ones. One's ears are turned more to the whispers of angels than to those of men. Man's focus becomes his own self rather than extraneous matters. He eschews superficiality and engages himself with deeper realities.

When man speaks, he is in a limited domain, but when he is silent he finds himself in the unlimited vastness of the world.

A Historical Review

The British put an end to the Muslim rule over India in 1857, giving a death blow to the Muslims' political and cultural supremacy. Japan witnessed a similar tragedy about ninety years ago in 1945 when America having completely destroyed its industrial and military power by dropping two atom bombs had succeeded in establishing its total domination over Japan.

During the past one and a half centuries after the fall of Their power, the Indian Muslims launched a number of movements for their reconstruction at the cost of great sacrifices. Right from the revolt of 1857 to the demolition of the Babri Mosque' in 1992, the sacrifices given by Indian Muslims of the subcontinent are too much that if an appraisal is made of these sacrifices in material terms it will come to a Himalayan magnitude. But all these sacrifices proved to be fruitless and of no avail to Muslims from any respect.

Let us now look at the Japanese nation. After the defeat in 1945, they started their struggle for reconstruction, and within a short span of forty years they not only made up for the loss suffered in the Second World War, but also managed to occupy a far more honourable position of the world.

What is the reason of this difference between the Muslim and Japanese communities/nations. There is only one reason and that is traceable to the different strategies/plan of action opted by the two towards the solution of their problems. The Muslims led by their incompetent leaders opted for their target to destroy their opponents (their target was the destruction of others). On the contrary, Japan led by their wise leaders resorted to the policy of self-construction. It is this difference of their approach, which accounts for the sharp difference between the state of the two communities.

In the mid nineteenth century when the British grabbed political power from the Muslims the initial reaction of the Muslim leaders was to recapture their lost power by resorting to violence. Muslim leaders, therefore, embarked upon a bloody battle against the British despite their ill-equippedness/insufficient preparation. This conflict aggravated their ruination a hundred fold. However, Muslim leaders ignorant of any other method/strategy held others responsible for their ruin and continued their collision course with the British.

Despite incurring huge losses, Muslim leaders and thinkers are still not able to come out mentally of this collision-course. They are completely unaware of any other approach except that of agitation and encounter. Consequently, whether it is the revolt of 1857 or the confrontation over the Babri Masjid this war-loving leadership has set Muslims, on all occasions, to the path of conflict to be welcomed only by deprivation and defeat.

All this does not mean to suggest that leaders with vision (wisdom) were never born in the Muslim community. Nature has always been generous to every community in this respect, wise and competent leaders have therefore always been born in the Muslim community. Unfortunately though, the Muslim did not pay any heed to the advice of their competent/worthy leaders: The basic reason being that a wise leader always addresses his people in a low-profile, but, due to certain reasons, the present Muslim psychology attaches importance only to high profile address (leadership), however baseless and meaningless they might be as regards reality.

Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) provides one notable example in this connection. Being an eye witness to the turmoil of 1857, and then after a critical observation/estimation of the situation he realised that the Muslims were not in a position to make an advance, but they were in a stage of preparation. He thus offered to the Muslims same suggestion as was done by the king Hirohito of Japan about a hundred years ago. Hirohito told his people that although America had destroyed our cities, its army had captured their territory, yet, he said that a sphere of action was still lying wide open for them. It was the field of knowledge. Admitting that the American domination over Japan was undoubtedly an unsufferable tragedy he said that they had to suffer the unsufferable in order that they could set the next generation on the path of knowledge and progress. After a little hesitation, the Japanese community finally wholeheartedly accepted Hirohito's advice. Subsequently, the entire world witnessed Japan's history taking a new turn through the efforts of only one generation.

Exactly the same suggestion was made by Sir Sayyed in the wake of 1857 revolt, to the Muslims of the subcontinent. He asked Muslims to accept the British domination temporarily, and to avoid any political encounter with their rulers as it was not going to serve their purpose. He tried to convince the Muslims that bright opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge were lying open for them, outside the sphere of the political dominance of the British. He tried to impress upon them that if they could devote their energies to the field of knowledge, their history would itself begin to change.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* gives the following description of Sir Sayyed's mission:

The supreme interest of Sayyed's life was education – in its widest sense. Sayyed advised the Muslims against joining active politics and to concentrate, instead, on education (1/369).

While Hirohito's people honoured/accepted their leaders' advice, Sir Sayyed's people rejected their leader's advice alleging/castigating him as a British agent. The difference of the result of respective responses is for all to see. Japan today occupies the top rung of the ladder of the world's developed nations. On the contrary, the Muslims are today engaged in putting pressure upon the Indian government to declare Muslims a backward class so that they may avail of the privileges reserved for such reserved communities.

It is the verdict of history, however, that a community which fails in the test of prudent/wise action, can never compensate for its loss/deprivation through agitational campaigns and charter of demands, even although their poets, orators and writers all join together in support of this demand.

Far from observing the whims and fancies of any group, this world strictly adheres to the immutable laws of nature. All the individual and collective achievements in this world can be gained only by conforming with the laws of nature. Those who follow their own desire will receive nothing in this world.

The Indian Muslims have to start their history anew from the point where they had left Sir Sayyid. They will have to learn to starve the problems and feed the opportunities (already, at hand). By availing the existing opportunities one enables oneself to solve over problems as well. Whereas one who is entangled in the problems not only loses out on the existing opportunities but also fails to solve the problems too.

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WOMAN BETWEEN ISLAM AND WESTERN SOCIETY

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

The status of woman in Islam is the same as that of man. Injunctions about honour and respect enjoined for one sex are enjoined equally for the other sex. So far as rights in this world and rewards in the Hereafter are concerned, there is no difference between the sexes. In the organization of daily living, both are equal participants and partners. Yet Islam sees man as man and woman as woman and, considering the natural differences, it advocates the principle of the division of labour between the two sexes rather than the equality of labour.

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On Islam and Jihad

A perusal of the Qur'an followed by a study of latter-day Muslim history will reveal a blatant contradiction between the two – that of principle and practice. Where recent developments in some Muslim countries bespeaks the culture of war, the Qur'an, on the contrary, is imbued with the spirit of tolerance. Its culture is not that of war, but of mercy.

At the very beginning of the Qur'an, the first invocation reads: "In the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Beneficent. Throughout the Qur'an, God's name is thus invoked no less than 113 times. Moreover, Qur'an states that the prophets were sent to the world *as a mercy to the people* (21:107).

The word 'jihad' has nowhere been used in the Qur'an to mean war in the sense of launching an offensive. It is used rather to mean 'struggle'. The action most consistently called for in the Qur'an is the exercise of patience. Yet today, the 'Muslim Mujahideen' under unfavourable conditions have equated "God is Great" with "War is Great." For them, the greatest reward is to be able to wield a Kalashnikov rifle.

In the light of on-going conflict, we must ask why so great a contradiction has arisen between the principles of Islam and the practices of Muslims. At least one root cause may be traced to historical exigency.

Since time immemorial, military commanders have been accorded positions of great eminence in the annals of history. It is a universal phenomenon that the hero is idolized even in peace time and becomes a model for the people. It is this placing of heroism in the militaristic context which has been the greatest underlying factor in the undue stress laid on war in the latter phase of Islam's history. With the automatic accord in Muslim society of a place of honour and importance to the heroes of the battlefield, annalists' subsequent compilations of Islamic history have tended to read like an uninterrupted series of wars and conquests.

These early chronicles having set the example, subsequent writings on Islamic history followed the same pattern of emphasis on militarism. The Prophet's biographies were called '*maghazi*', that is 'The Battles Fought by the Prophet,' yet the Prophet of Islam in fact did battle only three times in his entire life, and the period of his involvement in these battles did not total more than one and half days. He fought, let it be said, in self-defence, when hemmed in by aggressors, and he simply had no option. But historians – flying in the face of fact – have converted his whole life into one of confrontation and war.

We must keep it in mind that the Prophet Muhammad was born at a time when an atmosphere for militancy prevailed in the Arab society. There being, in their view, no other path to justice. But the Prophet always opted for avoidance of conflict. For instance, in the campaign of Ahzab, the Prophet advised his Companions to dig a trench between them and the enemies, thus preventing a head-on clash.

Another well-known instance of the Prophet's dislike for hostilities is his cessation of the campaign of Hudaibiya with a treaty, which made more concessions to the enemies than to his own people. In the case of the conquest of Mecca, he avoided a battle altogether by making a rapid entry into the city with ten thousand Muslims – a number large enough to awe his enemies into submission.

In this way, on all occasions, the Prophet endeavoured to achieve his objectives by peaceful rather than by war-like means. It is, therefore, unconscionable that in later biographical writing, all the events of his life have been arranged under the heading of 'battles' (*ghazawat*). How he managed to avert the cataclysms of war has not been dealt with in any of the works, which purportedly depict his life.

Ibn Khaldun, the celebrated 14th century historian, was the first to lay down definite rules for the study and writing of history and sociology. He followed the revolutionary course of attempting to present history as a chronicle of events centering on the common man rather than on kings, their generals and the battles they fought. But since the heroes were already entrenched as the idols of society, the caravan of writers and historians continued to follow the same well-worn path as had been trodden prior to Ibn Khaldun. When people have come to regard war heroes as the greatest of men, it is but natural that it is the events of the battlefield, which will be given the greatest prominence in works of history. All other events will either be relegated to the background or omitted altogether.

In the later phase of Islam, there came into existence a powerful group of Sufis – many of them great men, who exerted their influence on a multitude of people, their goal being to put an end to this contradiction between the tenets of Islam and Muslim conduct: they at least wanted to strike a balance between the two. But the Sufis failed in this, the principal reason being that they expressed themselves in terms of dreams and the realization of inspiration. The militant interpretation of Islam, on the contrary, was ostensibly based on history and knowledge. Dreams and personal realizations could, therefore, never adequately counter what had come to be regarded as hard facts. Objective reasoning cannot be bested by subjective postulations, and so the Sufis failed to establish the equilibrium between precept and practice, which they so ardently desired.

In the past when the sword was the only weapon of war, militancy did not lead to the mass-scale loss of life and property as modern warfare brings in its wake. In former times, fighting was confined to the battlefield; the only sufferers were those engaged in the battle. But today, the spear and sword have been replaced by megabombs and devastating long-range missiles, so that killing and destruction take place on a horrendous scale. It is the entire human settlement, which has now become the global arena of war. Even the air we breathe and the water we drink are left polluted in war's aftermath.

Hence people in the West find Islam outdated and irrelevant precisely because of its militant interpretation. Demands for a reform in Islam are on the increase, as the 'old' version of Islam cannot apparently keep pace with the modern world.

But, in reality, it is not reformation, which is urgent, but revival. What is needed is to discard as superficial and erroneous the militant and political interpretation of Islam, and to adopt the original, 'old' version of Islam based on peace, mercy and the love of mankind.

The so-called Muslim Mujahideen have been exhorting their co-religionists to do battle all over the world. But the Qur'an says: '... and God calls to the home of peace' (10:25). It is up to right-thinking people everywhere to disregard the Mujahideen call, and to start seeing and accepting Islam as it is truly represented by the Qur'an.

(Farida Khanam)

Viewing statements from a particular standpoint

A companion of the Prophet was once heard to pray: "Lord, have mercy on me and on Muhammad; and do not include in Your mercy anyone besides us." Looked at in a certain light, this statement could be interpreted to mean that this Companion harboured contempt for his own brethren. Why else would he seek to exclude them from God's mercy? But one might view his prayer in another light and agree with Maulana Shah Fadhil ar-Rahman Ganj Muradabadi that, the Companions being free of envy and contempt, this Companion's prayer stemmed, not from hate, but from an excess of love.

The Tragedy of Muslims

In the Delhi based Urdu daily *Qaumi Awaz* of November 15, 1994, a Muslim intellectual wrote that the Indian Muslims suffered from a persecution complex. Theirs was a psychology of deprivation which demoralized them, and rendered them unfit for any positive struggle.

Most of us would concede the truth of this statement. Just before reading this analysis, I had occasion to ask a student of the Aligarh Muslim University how his fellow students felt about this state of affairs. He replied that everyone was haunted by the fear of there being no scope for them in India. It was a fear, which loomed large on everyone's horizon. During the previous two years, on extensive travels throughout the length and breadth of the country, I had heard the same tales. Everywhere Muslims were in the grip of fear and despondency.

Despondency is held unlawful in Islam. The Qur'an is explicit on this point: 'No one despairs of God's mercy except those who have no faith' (12:87). According to early commentators on the Qur'an, in particular, Qatada and Zahrak, despondency is counted among the major sins (*Tafsir-e- Qurtubi* 9/252). Yet, here, we have an entire community falling a prey to frustration. How do we explain a community, which has successfully distanced itself from major sins – even in the world of today – being caught up in this particular sin?

Having thoroughly mulled over this question, I have to conclude, ultimately, that it is, in fact, our incompetent Muslim leaders who are to blame for this uncalled for tragedy. These so called leaders have repeatedly led Muslims in the direction of goals, which were unattainable. With such a goal placed before them as realistic and achievable, Muslims would rise with great zeal and fervour to the task. But they would finally discover that, despite their struggles and their sacrifices, they had achieved nothing. Continuous failures on every front pushed them to the extremes of despondency. Consciously or unconsciously, they came to feel that they had no future in this country. A close examination of the actual state of affairs will reveal, however, that it was in fact their own attitude and approach to problems, which were out of place in God's world. If they lacked opportunities, they felt that they were being denied them because of discrimination and prejudice. They came to the conclusion that *there were no opportunities for them in this country*, without stopping to consider that this might only seem so as a result of their own misguided or ill-considered course of action.

A major contributor to this mindset was Iqbal, the poet. His were the flights of poetic imagination, which encouraged Muslims to slip into unrealistic thinking. In thrall to his guidance, appreciative leaders and intellectuals began with great zeal to disseminate his poetic message. Thrilled by the eloquence of his words, a gullible public heard and accepted a 'message which bore no relation to reality.

Iqbal's message to the people was: "*Allah ke sheron ko aati nahin rubahi*" (God's lions know no cowardice). Statements like this caught the imagination of the people, without their realizing that no such lions existed in the world of God. They did not pause to consider that the lions of the jungle created by God never spared even a thought for the heroic deed, for all their instincts led them along the path of avoidance – call it cowardice, or call it good sense. However, by setting up Iqbal's imaginary lion as an ideal, – "Well said, Iqbal!" – Muslims have opted for the path of conflict and confrontation on the mistaken premise that this is what is meant by bravery, and that what they are doing amounts to a *jihad* (crusade).

For instance, when Hindus lead processions through the streets, there are generally certain aspects of them, which are displeasing to Muslims. A sure solution to all this unpleasantness is be the pursuance of the policy of avoidance as a wise strategy. But under the influence of Iqbal, Muslims feel that such a policy smacks of cowardice. So, holding up their imaginary lion as an ideal, they set themselves on a collision course with the processionists. The result is bloody, communal rioting.

Muslims adopt the way of the "lion" on the assumption that their action would boost the morale of the whole community. But such an action always proves to be counterproductive, because now we have a situation in which Muslims feel that their lives and property are no longer secure in their own country. And the degree of frustration they suffer on that score has if anything been intensified.

The most notorious experiment along these lines was, of course, their demand – at the urging of their great leader Jinnah – for the division of the country in 1947, so that the separate state of Pakistan might come into existence. They were told that once a powerful Muslim state was in position at the Indian border, it would act as a strong safeguard for all their rights in India.

At the cost of enormous sacrifices on the part of Indian Muslims, Pakistan came into being. Instead of decreasing, however, their problems only increased. This was because their lawyer Leader was blissfully unaware of the fact that the emergence of a strong Muslim state across the border after independence would necessarily be paralleled by the emergence of a strong Hindu state. It was this fatal miscalculation of the development of future events, which brought Muslim expectations tumbling to the ground. Even then, incompetent Muslim leaders failed to learn their lesson from this tragic experiment, and continued to make mistakes of the same nature.

A whole horde of Muslim leaders, led by Dr Abdul Jalil Faridi, came on the scene in the wake of 1965-66 general elections. By making fiery speeches, they succeeded in rallying Muslims under the banner of the "politics of agreement." Muslims thronged to join this political campaign, and after entering into electoral agreements with opposition parties, they gave them their vote. In this way, the Congress was ousted. But when these newly elected governments were formed, Muslims found to their horror that they were even worse off than they had been under Congress rule. This entire edifice of hope – barely erected – soon collapsed.

Similarly, when the Babari Mosque issue came into the limelight in 1986, Syed Shahabuddin conceived the far-fetched idea that it should be projected beyond its local significance and turned into an all-India issue. He thought that in this way the problem would be solved. Almost all of the religious and secular leaders extended their full support to Mr. Shahabuddin on this score. The entire country reverberated with public meetings and processions designed to achieve this goal.

What happened, in fact, was that once the entire Muslim minority had been aroused over the Ayodhya issue, the entire Hindu majority became united in their repudiation of Muslim demands. In the ensuing confrontation, the scales were bound to tilt in favour of this overwhelming Hindu majority. Forcing their entry into the Babari mosque, they razed it to the ground. No Muslim leader dared enter Ayodhya to put a stop to the destruction, and if failing to emerge victorious, be martyred.

The tragic incident of December 6 has pushed Muslims back into the deep dungeon of despondency. What is worse is that this time their feelings of frustration are accompanied by a deep sense of humiliation.

Now a new group of the so-called Muslim intellectuals has emerged on the horizon of the Muslim community. Their gambit is to make an issue of reservation for Muslims in government services, as if that were some kind of master card, which would solve all Muslim problems. Urdu dailies have been publishing their articles and statements to this effect couched in high flown language, and once again, Muslims are thronging to listen to their rabble-rousing speeches.

Muslims form fifteen per cent of the country's population. So they demand that Muslims should be given the same percentage of reservations in government services. I have no doubt that this is asking for the impossible. Even supposing, for the sake of argument, that the government, by legislation or presidential decree, ensured fifteen percent reservations in government jobs for the Muslim community, it would, in practice, be impossible for enough Muslims to come forward to fill these posts.

What is actually going to take place is the massive rallying of Muslims to the chant of high-sounding reservation slogans. There will be a demonstration of the rhetorical power of the leaders. Then, after a long period of hectic activity, it will ultimately dawn on these Muslims that they have given time, energy and money to support these feverish campaigns, but that they have in no way benefited from them.

To lead the community in pursuit of unattainable goals is a dastardly and inimical act: such hot pursuits lead not to the heights of success but to the depths of despair.

It is high time that Muslims understood the bitter truth. They should carve out their future on the basis of facts and reason, and not in a welter of emotion and sentiment. They should live like real lions created by God and not like the imaginary lions of poets' creation. What solved their problems in the past is what will solve their problems as a community today. No alternative solution is forthcoming in the reality of today's world.

Why Did I Embrace Islam?

By Muhammad Nazeeh Khalid

I was born in the city of Mansoorah in the Arab Republic of Egypt in an ordinary Christian family in which religion had not much significance. We did not go to Church except on festive and ceremonial occasions. As far as we were concerned, religion did not mean anything more than rites, which we observed, when necessary, even though we did not understand the language in which these rites were conducted. Despite our not grasping what they meant, the rest of my family was deep in the blind fanaticism of the ignorant, who fear the loss of a thing even though they do not know its value. As for myself I never had such feelings even for a single moment. I found the services so tedious that I never sat through them to their conclusion. I was plagued by boredom and unease. I felt sure that I was not meant to be one of them. I felt a total stranger in this place full of pictures, icons and statues like the temples of the idolaters of yore. Then I turned to reading with inexhaustible greed and enthusiasm, which stimulated my faculties and sharpened my feelings.

Questions began to strike my mind like a spade striking virgin land to prepare it for the sowing of good seeds to bring forth delicious fruits. It was at this time that doubt arose within me about the religion to which I was born, violently and extensively shattering my frame of mind. My heart rejected emotionally and my mind denied logically the idea that Almighty God could appear in the tangible form of a man and come down to the earth and permit sinners to beat him, to spit on his face, and ultimately to torture and crucify him (according to the Christian claim), even if it was to exonerate them from the fault of their father Adam, as the Christians argue. As for the belief that God has three entities, this too I refused to admit as true, because God is one and only one and He has no comparer. As for the doctrine of the trinity, it must ultimately lead to a division of the entity of God Himself, whose glory is far above such a misconception. Such beliefs are the fundamentals of Christianity, viz., the divinity of Jesus Christ, his crucifixion as an atonement for humanity, and the Trinity the Father, the Son and The Holy Ghost. I banished these beliefs totally from the domain of my thinking; expelled them from my mind; and struck them off the register of my beliefs and conviction. I thus discarded all false and misleading beliefs.

They say that it is not possible to acquire sound belief through wisdom, because it is too sublime to be within the reach of the human mind. I, on my part, am fully convinced that if we use our intellect rightly, refined of the turbidity of passion and pre-conceived, ready-made ideologies, we can surely find a wealth of firm and unshakable Faith in Allah and in His supreme might and ability, before Whose dazzling signs one has no alternative but to surrender in humility and helplessness. Thus did I cross over the mountains of doubt of firm belief: the true religion of Allah which is Islam.

REVEALED RELIGIONS

I studied the revealed religions as well as the non-revealed cults, like Buddhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, etc. In some I found traces of high morals and philosophy of the sort to guide man to ideal conduct. But when it comes to formulating a definition of Allah, they go too far either by supposing many gods, each of them entrusted with the management of one specific department of the affairs of the world, or by presenting Allah in tangible form, resembling very closely the forms and shapes of earthly creatures. These gods indulge both in serious activities and in vengeful pranks, express anger, eat and drink, and generally behave as mortals do.

As for Islam, it is the religion of nature. Almighty Allah has purified it of all material and tangible forms, and raised it to the highest degree of spiritualism and purity. Islam confirms that Allah possesses, will, wisdom, discretion, knowledge and authority. According to Islam, Allah's beautiful names are attributes which cannot be separated from His Being under any circumstances. It also emphasizes His oneness, which is not shared by anyone, and His existence for all eternity, as mentioned in Surah 112.

Say He is Allah the One and Only.

Allah, the Absolute, the Eternal.

He begot none, nor was He begotten.

And no one is comparable to Him.

Thus did Islam attract me to its sublime and sacred fold – Islam the purest and sublimest of the revealed religions, unsullied by apostasy or the doctrine of incarnation.

ACCEPTANCE OF ISLAM

On the 8th of Ramadan I entered the mosque for the first time with two companions. My soul and conscience became purified in the melting pot of magnificent faith. I underwent that sweet, pleasant experience which opened to me the door of salvation. Every bit of my body pulsed with a pious soaring, high in the high heavens. Neither did I feel disgusted nor perplexed – No, never. It was the radiation of brilliant light which shone outside and inside of me which acquainted me with who I really was. Soft, soothing, melodious inner voices whispered to me that from now onwards, till the end of my life, my path was Islam. In this moment which rose high above the summits of time, I stood before Allah, the One and Only, the Almighty, the Forgiving. His most High Spirit embraced me and asked me to resign myself to His care after the period of my prolonged loss and misfortune. Immediately after concluding the prayer, I took the Holy Book at the gate of the Al-Husain mosque, and came back home imbibing enlightenment from the seas of its sacred verses and its eternal, clear wisdom by which I was thoroughly overwhelmed. This is the Book of God “about which there is no doubt.”

“Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or behind it.” (41:32)

It shall remain preserved till the end of the world without distortion or change.

“We have without doubt, sent down the message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption).” (15:9)

In plunging into this Divine, copious and flowing bounty, I uttered the two Shahdatain (testimonies) and announced my Islam to Allah. So that the firmness of my faith might flourish and its impact on me might grow strong, I began to read books and works of contemporary Muslim thinkers who command influence in the Arab and other Muslim countries, Aqqad, a famous literary figure in Egypt, being one of them.

I hope in all humbleness that Allah may accept my Islam which I have embraced heart and soul as my last refuge. I have entered the fold of Islam in love of God, and His Prophet whose status is sublime and exalted and whose personality is unique and exceptional. I have always appreciated and honoured him in the past and have an unflinching belief that he is the greatest of all personalities to leave an indelible mark on the annals of world history.

One does not lose by giving

Abu Hurayrah reports this saying of the Prophet: "Charity does not decrease anyone's wealth while forgiveness only increases a man's honour; God raises up one who abases himself before his Lord."

(Muslim, *Sahih*)

The Master Key

An article in an Arabic magazine headlined *Al-Miftahul Azim* (Master Key), citing *da'wah* power as the greatest of all Islamic strengths, says that if in the past, Islam achieved its universal victories through *da'wah*, today, it can turn its defeats into victories by the same method.

Da'wah is very much under discussion these days among Muslim writers and speakers. Its exponents, however, spend more time unraveling the plots and conspiracies hatched against them by non-Muslim nations than in practising what they preach. That is to say that, on the one hand, they exhort Muslims to assume the role of *da'is* while, on the other hand, they assure them with great vehemence that as far as the Muslims are concerned, all the nations of the world have turned into rapacious wolves and, as such, must be fought against and annihilated.

Both these utterances are made in the same breath, without any awareness of their contradictory nature, the one spelling peace and the other spelling war. And who are these nations who, day in and day out, are labelled oppressors and conspirators? They are those very non-Muslim nations who are the potential recipients of *da'wah*. They are our *mad'us*. The Muslims are the *da'is* and their neighbouring nations are the *mad'us*. Now, when *da'is* are constantly having it dinned into them that the *mad'u* is a cruel predator, there can be no arousal of any sincere missionary spirit as described in the Qur'an: the *da'i* is truly a well-wisher of his *mad'u*.

Da'wah is wholly an experience of love. The *da'i* must be fully committed to guiding his *mad'u*. Only then can the process of *da'wah* be meaningful. The *da'is* must ignore the antagonism and combativeness of the *mad'u*; he must erase all adverse impressions of the *mad'u* from his heart, so that he may spontaneously begin praying for the *mad'u's* guidance.

People talk of *da'wah* without ever realizing its pre-requisites. They want the credit for being *da'is* without ever fulfilling its demands. They want the credit for communicating the divine message to man without paying the price for it.

This is true not only of the weak Muslim minority in non-Muslim countries, but also of the Muslim majority living in Muslim countries. The only difference between these two categories is that the former have endless grievances against the local non-Muslim authorities, while the latter blame their woes on international non-Muslim powers such as the Jews, Christians, Orientalists, and so on.

In Islam, the most important consideration of all is *da'wah*. All other considerations, no matter how serious and important they may be, can be legitimately passed over in its favour. The Sunnah of the Prophet gives such clear guidelines on this subject as leaves no doubt in the mind of a lover of Truth.

Shortly before his migration to Madina, the Prophet visited Ta'if. There, scorned by the inhabitants, he was subjected to the worst kind of humiliations details of which can be had from Sirah books. The Prophet later told his wife, 'Aishah, that he had never had a harder day than the one in Ta'if. It was when the Prophet left Ta'if in great grief and sorrow that he was visited by the angel of the mountains at God's command. He said to the Prophet, "God has heard what your people had said to you. I am the angel of the mount. If you ask me I can crush their settlement by these mountains". The Prophet replied, "No, I am still hopeful that there will arise people among their following generations who will worship God without associating anything with Him." (*As-Sirah an-Nabawiyya li Ibn Kathir* vol. II, p. 153).

It is quite plain that *da'wah* is the master key. But it takes a great heart to make use of it. It takes a character of the utmost sublimity – *khuluqin azim*, as it is described in the Qur'an. Only those who possess such qualities can recognize and utilize such opportunities as come their way.

God has made *da'wah* the master key for believers for all time. Whatever the Muslims gained in the first phase of Islamic history was through *da'wah*. Any future gains will likewise be through *da'wah*, for the revolution brought about by the Prophet and his companions in world history is still making its impact. It has facilitated the process of *da'wah* and invested them with great power. It is still the super key to meaningful achievement in the world of religion.

In modern times, the latest methods of communication have provided new avenues for the propagation of Islam. But even more important is the development of various branches of scientific research which have quite finally established the veracity of Islam. What was formerly achieved by our predecessors in circumstances fraught with great difficulty because of poor, or non-existent communications, and a lack of scientific proofs, can now be accomplished with comparative ease.

Da'wah is certainly the master key for believers. But it will prove to be so only when true Islamic pre-requisites are kept in mind.

Faith and Reason

In its issue 134 (1992), the journal, *Faith and Reason*, published from Manchester College, Oxford (England), brought out an article titled 'The Relationship between Faith and Reason', by Dr Paul Badham. Paul Badham is a Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at St. David's College, Lampeter, in the University of Wales. His paper in this issue had been presented at a Conference of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow in November 1991.

Professor Badham's paper can indeed be called thought provoking, and as such, is worth reading, but he has made certain points with which I do not agree. He states that philosophical certainty should not be confused with religious certitude. He writes: 'As a philosopher of religion I feel compelled to acknowledge that faith could never be placed on the same level of certainty as scientific knowledge' (p. 6). On the contrary, I feel that faith and belief can be placed on the same level of certainty as scientific theory. At least, in the twentieth century there is no real difference between the two.

Knowledge is composed of two kinds of things, as Bertrand Russell puts it, knowledge of things and knowledge of truths. This dichotomy exists in religion as well as in science. For instance, to the scientist who regards biological evolution as a scientific fact, there are two aspects to be considered. One is related to the organic part of species and the other relates to the law of evolution which is inherently and covertly operative in the continuing process of change among the species.

When an evolutionist studies the outward physical appearance of species, he may be said to be studying 'things'. Whereas when he studies the law of evolution, he deals with that aspect of the subject which is termed the 'study or knowledge of truths.'

Every evolutionist knows that there is a basic difference between the two aspects. As far as the study of things or the phenomena of evolution is concerned, direct evidence is available. For instance, because the study of fossils found in various layers of the earth's crust is possible at the level of observation, working hypothesis may be based thereon.

On the contrary, as far as facts about the law of evolution are concerned, due to the impossibility of objective observation, direct argument is not possible. For instance, the concept of sudden mutations in the organs is entirely based on assumptions rather than on direct observation. In the case of mutations, external changes are observable, but the cause, that is, the law of nature, is totally unobservable. That is why all the evolutionists make use of indirect argument, which in logic is known as inferential argument.

The concept of mutation forms the basis of the theory of evolution. However there are two aspects to the matter. One comes under observation, but the second part is totally unobservable. It is only by making use of the principle of inference that this second part of evolution may be included in the theory of evolution.

It is a commonplace that all the offsprings of men or animals are not uniform. Differences of one kind or another are to be found. In modern times this biological phenomenon has been scientifically studied. These studies have revealed spontaneous changes suddenly produced in the foetus in the mother's womb. It is these changes that are responsible for the differences between children of the same parents.

These differences between offsprings are observable. But the philosophy of evolution subsequently formed on the basis of this observation is totally unobservable and is based only on inferential argument. That is to say that the 'things' of evolution are observable, while the 'truths' inferred from observation are unobservable.

Now, what the evolutionist does is put a goat at one end and a giraffe at the other. Then taking some middle specimens of the fossils he forms a theory that the neck of one of the offsprings of the earlier generation of the goat was somewhat taller. Then when this particular offspring with the taller neck gave birth, this tallness for generations over millions of years ultimately converted the initial goat with a taller neck into a species like the giraffe in its advanced stage. Charles Darwins writes of this change in his book *The Origin of Species*: "... it seems to me almost certain that an ordinary hoofed quadruped might be converted into a giraffe" (p. 169).

In this case, the existence of differences between the various offsprings of a goat is itself a known fact. But the accumulation of this difference, generation after generation, over millions of years resulting in a new species known as 'giraffe' is wholly unobservable and unrepeatable. This conclusion has been inferred from observation only; the whole process of mutation developing into a new species has never come under our direct observation.

Exactly the same is true of the subject of religion. One aspect of the study of religion is the study of its history, its personalities, its injunctions, its rites and its rituals. The above division (knowledge of things and knowledge of truths) amounts to a study of the 'things' of religion. In respect of religion, objective information is likewise available. As such, the study of religion too can be done on the basis of direct observations exactly as is done in the study of biological evolution.

The second aspect of the study of religion is what is termed, in general, beliefs pertaining to the unseen world. These are the beliefs that are beyond our known sensory world. That is, the existence of God and the angels, revelation, hell and heaven, etc. In this other aspect of religion direct observations do not exist. The study of religion must, therefore, be done in the light of that logical principle called inference on the basis of observation, that is, the same logical principle which the evolutionists employ in the second aspect of their theory.

Looked at in the light of this principle, both religion and science are at a par. Both have two equally different parts. One part is based on such scientific certainty as permits direct argument. The other part is based on scientific inference, to prove which only the principle of indirect argument may be used. Keeping this logical division before us, we can find no actual difference between the two.

The unnecessary apologia for religious uncertainty made by Professor Badham is occasioned by his inability to consider this difference, and his confusing one area of study with another. Making the error of false analogy, he is comparing the first part of science to the second part of religion and looking at the second part of religion in the light of the first part of science. This meaningless comparison is responsible for the ill-considered conclusions he has arrived at in his article.

Had the worthy Professor compared the first part of science to the first part of religion and the second part of science to the second part of the religion, his inferiority complex (as a man of religion) would have ceased to exist. He would have felt that, purely as a matter of principle the wrong parallels had been drawn. The argument used in the first part of science is equally applicable to the first part of religion. Similarly the argument applied to the second part of science is equally applicable to the second part of religion.

This is a truth which has been acknowledged even by a staunch and leading atheist like Bertrand Russell. At the beginning of his book *Why I am not a Christian* he has set forth what he considers a valid argument. He points out that in his view all the great religions of the world-Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Communism – were all untrue and harmful, and that it is not possible to prove their validity from the logical point of view. Those who have opted for one religion or the other have done so, according to Russell, under the influence of their traditions and environment, rather than on the strength of argument.

However, Bertrand Russell has admitted this fact when he says, “there is one of these arguments which is not purely logical. I mean the argument from design. This argument, however, was destroyed by Darwin.”

He intends here to say that the existence of God is proved by the argument that in this world where there is design, there should be a designer. He admits that this method of argument in its nature is the same as that used to prove scientific concepts. However, even after this admission, he rejects this argument by saying that it has been destroyed by Darwinism.

This is, however, a wholly baseless point, as Darwin's theory is related to the Creator's process of creation rather than to the existence of Creator. To put it briefly, Darwinism states that the various species found in the world were not separate creations but had changed from one species into separate species over a prolonged period of evolution by a process of natural selection.

It is obvious that this theory is not related to the existence or non-existence of God. It deals with the process of Creation instead of the Creator. That is to say, if it was hitherto believed that God created each species separately, now after accepting the theory of evolution it has to be believed that God originally created an initial species which was invested with the capability of multiplying into numerous species. And then He set in motion a natural process in the universe favourable to such multiplication. In this way, over a long period of time this primary species fulfilled its potential by changing into innumerable species. To put it another way, the theory of evolution is not a study of the existence of God, but simply of how God has displayed in the universe his power of creation. That is why Darwin himself has concluded his famous book, *The Origin of Species* with these words:

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved (p. 408).

It is true that the new facts regarding the universe discovered in the twentieth century have revolutionized the world of logic. Now the difference between religious argument and scientific argument which had been erroneously conceived prior to the twentieth century, has been eliminated. Now in respect of argument, the case of science too has reached exactly the same point as religion.

Newton (1642-1727) made a special study of the solar system, discovering laws governing the revolution of planets around the sun. His study was, however, confined to astronomical bodies, which can be called the macro-world. It is possible in the macro world to weigh and measure things. As a result of the immediate impact of these discoveries, many began to think along the lines that reality was observable, and that proper and valid argument was one based on observation. It was under the influence of this concept that the philosophy generally known as positivism came into being.

However the discoveries made in the first quarter of the century shook the very foundation of their preliminary theories. These later discoveries revealed that beyond this world of appearance, a whole world was hidden, which does not come under observation. It is only indirectly possible to understand this hidden world and present arguments in its favour. That is, by observing the effects of something, we arrive at an understanding of its existence.

This discovery altered the whole picture. When the access of human knowledge was limited to the macro-cosmic world, man was a prey to this misapprehension. But when human knowledge penetrated the micro-world, the academic situation changed on its own.

Now it was revealed that the field of direct argument was extremely limited. New facts which came to the knowledge of man were so abstruse that indirect or inferential argument alone was applicable. For instance, The German scientist, Wilhelm Konrad Roentgen found in 1895 during an experiment that on a glass before him some effects were observable, despite the fact that there was no known link between his experiment and the glass. He concluded that there was an invisible radiation which was travelling at the speed of 186,000 miles per second. Due to the unknown nature of this radiation, Roentgen named it X-rays (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 19/1058).

The twentieth century has seen the discoveries of a number of things like X-rays, which do not come under direct human observation. However due to their effects having come to the knowledge of man, it was not possible to deny their existence. As a result of modern research, not only were different departments of science revolutionized but the science of logic too saw basic changes.

Now inferential reasoning was also accepted as a valid method of reasoning, for, without this, discoveries like X-rays, the scientific structure of the atom, the existence of Dark Matter, etc., could not have been explained.

After the extension of this method of reasoning in modern times, argument on religious faith has become as valid as reasoning on scientific concepts. Exactly the same inferential logic which was employed to prove the newly discovered concepts of science, was applicable to religious faiths to prove their veracity. Now differences in the criterion of logic have vanished.

Answer to a Question

At the end of his article Professor Badham writes:

And I have to acknowledge that the existence of so much evil and suffering in the world counts against any vision of an all-powerful and loving God (p. 7).

Here I have to say that evil is a relative word. An evil is an evil so long as it cannot be explained. A doctor performs surgery on the patient's body, a judge sentences a criminal to be hanged. All this appears to be injustice, cruelty. But we do not call it so, simply because we have a proper explanation to give for the acts of the judge and the doctor. The same is true of the evil pointed out by the article writer.

The first point is that the evil existing in human society is not spread over the entire universe. Leaving aside the limited human world, the vast universe is perfect, par excellence. It is entirely free of any defect or evil.

Now the question arises as to why there is evil in the human world. To arrive at an understanding of this we shall have to understand the creation plan of the Creator. The creation plan of God provides the only criterion by which to judge the nature of the matter.

The creation plan of God as revealed to His Prophet is that this world is a testing ground, where man's virtue is placed on trial. It is in accordance with the records of this trial period that man's eternal fate will be decreed. It is for the purpose of this test that he has been granted freedom. In the absence of freedom, the question of life being a test would not arise.

The present evil is, in fact, a concomitant of this freedom. God desires to select those individuals who, in spite of being granted freedom, lead a disciplined and principled life. For individuals to prove their worth an atmosphere of freedom must be provided. Undoubtedly, due to such an atmosphere, some people will surely misuse this freedom and perpetrate injustice. But this is the inevitable price to be paid for such a creation plan to be brought to completion. No better creation plan can be envisaged for this world.

The present world appears meaningless when seen independently, that is, without joining the Hereafter with it. But when we take this world and the Hereafter together, the entire matter takes a new turn. Now this world becomes extremely meaningful and extremely valuable.

For details regarding the method of argument refer to the book *Religion and Science* by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (pp. 9-21).